

Havens sprout in the 'hood

Storefronts offer refuge from imminent violence to people on the street

BY MARJORIE BEGGS

DINA Hilliard inventoried The New Tenderloin's hearings, research and committee meetings at the September Futures Collaborative. TNT, she said, also has launched a Safe Havens program — central city businesses, offices, churches and hotels that serve as temporary refuges for people who feel unsafe on the street.

"Our target for this campaign was always kids, seniors and the disabled," Safety Network community organizer Hilliard later told The Extra, "but, of course, it's open to anyone who feels threatened — maybe they come upon a fight among drug dealers and need a place to duck into."

So far, 22 sites have signed on, most in the Tenderloin and a handful on Sixth Street, exceeding the campaign's goal of 15 sites. As of Oct. 1, 14 sites were confirmed, their windows sporting a neon green decal showing the owners and staff have received the 10-page manual and were trained, and that this is an official Safe Haven.

Hilliard, TNDC's Tomiquia Moss, Safety Network community organizer Meital Amitai and several central city residents recruited the participating sites, wrote the manual and did the one-on-one training.

TNT's Violence Task Group, one of its three standing committees, and the Community Housing Organizing Project (CHOP), Community Housing Partnership's civic involvement effort, coordinate the campaign.

According to the manual, people working at a Safe Haven shouldn't view themselves as surrogate police or vigilantes, or get in the middle of disputes.

Their only obligation is to provide 15 minutes of safety and phone 911, if warranted.

The decision to call for assistance is based on answering yes to one or both questions: Does providing the haven put more people at risk? Is the situation too hot for haven staff to handle safely? If

yes, call for help immediately.

If no — if staff determine the person just needs to get off the street for a few minutes — they calm him or her down and offer to phone a family member or friend. Calling for outside professional help is still an option, if questioning turns up an unexpected problem.

The manual is full of good advice for calming a person: Focus on the logical consequences, not the cause, of the person's distress; discourage ogles and amateur interventions; designate one person at the site to be the lead; make eye contact and listen actively but keep 1½ arms length from the person; call Behavioral Health's Mobile Crisis, not 911, if the person seems mentally distressed.

When the incident is over, site staff fill out an incident report. The campaign's AmeriCorps intern, LaVada Moore, collects reports regularly and checks in at each site to make sure everything's okay.

The report information is confidential and can omit the person's name because the project, says the manual, is mainly "interested in outcomes." It also lays out its premise: "Everyone deserves to walk the streets in safety."

"I really believe that," said Doug Sonn, co-owner of Morty's Deli at 280 Golden Gate, who's worked in the Tenderloin for eight years. "As business owners, we're trying to do something proactive here, helping people who live and work here, not just pointing the finger at others and complaining."

Sonn had recently put his green Safe Haven sign in the window and as yet, no one's come in. "But I'm hoping people will use it."

The idea of safe havens isn't new to the city. In 1996, the late activist Diane Rose launched Kampaign Kidz, which included havens for school-age kids who needed a safe place to go fast. At its height, in 2001, 270 schools, libraries, Rec and Park facilities in low-income neighborhoods, and every police and fire station citywide were on Kampaign Kidz' roster of havens.

Staff evaluated the kid in trouble, filled out an intake form, then called 911. The 911 responder, usually police from the closest station, came to the site and took over. An organization called Kampaign Kidz Hunters Point is listed online, but The Extra was unable to confirm the extent of its operations and if it offers safe havens.

Hilliard isn't sure what will be done with the incident reports. "We want to collect data on what types of situations most affect the sites so we can better support them," she said. "The whole process is community-driven so things are sometimes less formal to begin [with]."

No havens have been used yet, as far as she knows, she said.

For more information on TNT's Safe Havens, contact the Safety Network, 538-8100 x204, or CHOP, 749-2790 x356.

Y'S \$60 MILLION FUTURE

Info is trickling in about the coming reincarnation of 220 Golden Gate — the Central YMCA building that will be renovated into housing for extremely low-income and chronically homeless people.

The \$60 million project is scheduled to start in 2009 and will take two years to complete, according to TNDC Senior Project Manager Mara Blitzer and A.F. Evans Project Manager Bre Jones, who presented at the September Collaborative meeting.

TNDC and A.F. Evans formed a partnership to buy the property, Blitzer said. During development, the two organizations are co-developers, with A.F. Evans taking the lead; when construction is complete, A.F. Evans bows out, leaving TNDC as the owner and property manager. Gelfand Partners is the architect.

The 175 studios will have full baths and micro-kitchenettes — fridge, microwave, sink, two burners and cabinets. Though the Y's pool will not survive the restoration, the grand staircase, auditorium and gym will be preserved. For amenities, DPH plans to put in a wellness center that will include holistic, non-Western medicine and practitioners, Blitzer said.

"What are you doing for social services?" asked Collaborative Chair Glenda Hope.

The provider hasn't been chosen yet, Blitzer said, but on-site services will include social workers and psych professionals.

"What's happening to the current residents of the Y, commercial and residential?" asked Daniel O'Connor, St. Anthony's community liaison.

"We know that Wu Yee Children's Services will be back," Blitzer said. "The other commercial tenants, Tenderloin Health's admin offices and Huckleberry House's Community Assessment and Referral Center, have found alternative locations."

Of the 103 residential rooms, 42 are occupied, about half by long-term residents who will be eligible for relocation benefits when the Y closes, Blitzer said.

The Y's lease runs through March 2008, she added, but it's still looking for a transitional site. Executive Director Carmela Gold wasn't at the meeting to give an update.

And the Y's two surface parking lots — what's happening with those? asked Mark Aaronson, Hastings professor and director of its Civil Justice Clinic.

"A.F. Evans decided not to move forward with purchasing them," Blitzer said. "They're still for sale." A.F. Evans had planned to construct 40 one- and two-bedroom market rate condos on the sites, a sale that would have helped the Y finance its new home at Golden Gate Avenue and Larkin, next to the Hastings garage project.

Gold made it to the meeting just as it ended. The Extra ask her if the Y will, in fact, be ready to move by March.

"We're working to set a move-out date that will work best for all three parties and, most important, for the community," Gold said. "The transition site? It's been an incredibly frustrating, on-again off-again deal."

The Y found several sites in the neighborhood but none of the negotiations panned out. Gold thought the Y might have something to announce in November. ■

Safe Havens

THESE 22 sites have signed on as safe havens. As of Oct. 1, 14 had completed training and posted the Save Haven decal.

- Club Crash — 34 Mason St.
- Creativity Café-Rancho Parnassus — 132 Sixth St.
- Downtown Grocery — 289 Eddy St.
- Empire Market — 399 Eddy St.
- Eugene Friend Rec Center — 270 Sixth St.
- G & H Liquors — 201 Jones St.
- Gray Area Art Gallery and TL Community Benefit District (future site) — 90 Turk St.
- Hospitality House — 280 Turk St.
- Hospitality House — 181 Sixth St.
- Hospitality House Art Studio — 146 Leavenworth St.
- Iroquois Hotel — 835 O'Farrell St.
- Morty's Deli — 280 Golden Gate Ave.
- TL Community Benefit District (current site) — 118 Jones St.
- Rose Hotel — 125 Sixth St.
- St. Boniface Church — 133 Golden Gate Ave.
- San Cristina Hotel — 1000 Market St.
- Senator Hotel — 473 Ellis St.
- Shih Yu-Lang YMCA youth department — 220 Golden Gate Ave.
- TNDC administrative offices — 201 Eddy St.
- Vixen — 220 Jones St.
- Wild Awakenings — 142 McAllister St.
- Youth with a Mission — 357 Ellis St.

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